

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KATHMA 03845 300700Z

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SUBJ: GON AND THE PRESS

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1. SIMON'S MENTION OF PRE-CENSORSHIP IN NEPAL IS INACCURATE. UNDER NEWLY PASSED AMENDMENTS TO PRESS ACT PRE-CENSORSHIP IS NOT BEING IMPOSED UPON FOREIGN OR LOCAL PRESS. CHIRAN THAPA, JOINT PRESS SECRETARY AND ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL ADVISORS TO THE KING, ASSURED DCM IN A CONVERSATION AUGUST 27 THAT IT WAS NOT THE INTENT OF THE NEW PRESS ACT TO IMPOSE PRE-CENSORSHIP ON FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS. NEW ACT, HOWEVER, CLEARLY EMPOWERS GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL TO CONSTITUTE CENSORSHIP COMMITTEE WHICH MAY ON AN AD HOC BASIS SEND OUT CIRCULARS TO LOCAL AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS REQUIRING THEM TO SEND THEIR INDIVIDUAL ISSUES/ARTICLES TO COMMITTEE FOR PRE/CENSORSHIP. COMMITTEE NOT YET FORMED AND LOCAL AND FOREIGN PRESS REPRESENTATIVES TELL US THEY ARE FILING THEIR STORIES AS USUAL.

2. NEW AMENDMENTS TO PRESS ACT REQUIRE FOREIGN JOURNALISTS NOT TO WRITE AGAINST NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY
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PAGE 02 KATHMA 03845 300700Z

OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT. FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS AS

WELL AS WITH PREVIOUS ADMONITION AGAINST WRITING ARTICLES AGAINST KING, MONARCHY, PARTYLESS PANCHAYAT SYSTEM, ETC., CONTAINED IN ORIGINAL PRESS ACT, WOULD RESULT IN CANCELLATION OF THE JOURNALISTS' PRESS CREDENTIALS AND/OR DEPORTATION FROM NEPAL.

3. NEW AMENDMENTS FURTHERMORE REQUIRE ALL FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS AND NEPALESE CORRESPONDENTS FOR FOREIGN PAPERS/MAGAZINES ETC. TO APPLY WITHIN THIRTY-FIVE DAYS FOR NEW PRESS CREDENTIALS. UNDER NEW RULES ANY JOURNALIST WISHING TO FILE STORY FROM NEPAL USING COMMERCIAL CHANNELS (EITHER AT STANDARD OR CONCESSIONARY PRESS RATES) MUST HAVE PRESS CREDENTIALS. UNTIL NOW JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FILE STORIES WITHOUT PRESS CREDENTIALS IF THEY WERE WILLING TO PAY CONSIDERABLY HIGHER STANDARD COMMERCIAL CABLE RATES RATHER THAN THE CONCESSIONARY PRESS RATE PROVIDED BY MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS TO THOSE WITH ACCREDITATION. EXCEPTIONS TO FILING REQUIREMENT MAY BE MADE FOR JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING HEAD OF STATE OR HIGH-LEVEL DELEGATION.

4. TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE PROCEDURES FOR GRANTING OF PRESS CREDENTIALS REMAIN SAME AS BEFORE.

5. UNDE NEW LAW THERE IS NO BAN ON UNACCREDITED JOURNALISTS ENTERING NEPAL, WRITING A STORY AND THEN LEAVING NEPAL TO FILE AN ARTICLE. IN ALL PROBABILITY, HOWEVER, SHOULD SUCH AN ARTICLE CARRY MATERIAL CONTRARY TO NEW NEPALESE PRESS GUIDELINES FILING JOURNALIST WOULD BE DENIED NEPALESE VISA IF HE/SHE TRIED TO RETURN TO NEPAL AND WOULD PRESUMABLY NOT RECEIVE NEPALESE PRESS CREDENTIALS.

6. FOR FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH NEW AMENDMENTS GON MAY LEVY A FINE NOT EXCEEDING SIX THOUSAND RUPEES OR IMPOSE UP TO SIX MONTHS IMPRISONMENT OR BOTH. WHERE THE PERSON IS A FOREIGN NATIONAL, HE MAY BE EXPELLED FROM THE KINGDOM.

7. COMMENT: IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL EXACTLY WHAT ULTIMATE IMPACT OF THESE CHANGES IN PRESS ACT WILL BE ON AP, UPI, ETC. FEELING AMONG LOCAL JOURNALISTS REPRESENTING FOREIGN MEDIA LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 KATHMA 03845 300700Z

SERVICES ON ONE OF GREAT CAUTION. THEY ARE STRICTLY ADHERING TO THE NEW GUIDELINES. REPRESENTATIVE FOR ONE FOREIGN JOURNAL NOTED HE IS PRACTICING SELF-CENSORSHIP IN ORDER TO ASSURE HIS ACCREDITATION. IN THIS CONNECTION SAME JOURNALIST NOTED WITH CONCERN THAT HE UNCERTAIN WHAT EFFECT ON HIM WOULD BE IF HIS REGIONAL CORRESPONDENT WERE TO WRITE AN ARTICLE OBVIOUSLY VIOLATING NEW GUIDELINES. HE FEELS THAT IN SUCH SITUATION HIS OWN TONED DOWN ARTICLES MIGHT SAVE HIS CREDENTIALS.

FIRST INDICATOR OF IMPACT ON FOREIGN MEDIA OF NEW LAW WILL BE
TIME IT TAKES REPRESENTATIVES TO GET NEW PRESS CREDENTIALS
AND WHO, IF ANYONE, IS DENIED ACCREDITATION. CURRENT RESIDENT
REPRESENTATIVES DO NOT SEEM TO WANT TO TEST PARAMETERS OF NEW
LAW AT THIS TIME AND WE MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR VISIT BY MAJOR
REGIONAL CORRESPONDENT TO HAVE TEST CASE. CARGO

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